

TO THE
PROPRIETORS
OF THE
COMMON OF OTMOOR.

FINDING that Mr. Taunton, of Oxford, has taken the liberty of accusing me of improper conduct towards him, for having revived the Bill which was brought forwards a few years ago for the purpose of draining and dividing Otmoor, under the provisional management of the same gentlemen who were the original conductors of it, I am compelled to adopt this method of addressing you in my own justification.

Mr. Taunton asserts that he has a kind of *right*, or *title*, to be employed as the Solicitor, from having been formerly *concerned* in the business. It is necessary therefore to call to your recollection the nature of that *concern*, and the degree of *merit* which may be supposed to attach upon it.

First, When the drainage and division of Otmoor was first thought of, and whilst the plan was perfectly in *embryo*, Mr. Taunton, having heard of it accidentally, immediately intruded himself into the business, and, without the authority of a single person, stuck up the notices before the Proprietors had been consulted, or their sentiments were known, directly contrary to the mode of proceeding which I had suggested.

Secondly, These premature and unauthorized notices produced a great ferment in the country; a petition was presented by some of the poor people to Lord Abingdon, as Lord of the Manor, and though, on that account, he was the chief person whose consent should have been previously obtained, the first word he heard of any intention of draining and dividing Otmoor was from this application for his protection against it. His Lordship had good reason to be offended; his decided opposition, and the subsequent abandonment of the Bill, were the consequence. To this rash and officious step of Mr. Taunton it is solely owing that the plan was not carried into execution thirteen years ago, and that this barren waste is not now smiling with fields of corn.

Thirdly, When Mr. Taunton found that he had raised this storm, and that Lord Abingdon was become hostile, he changed sides, deserted his former pretended friends, opposed the drainage and division of Otmoor to his utmost, and became Solicitor to the petition against it.

Fourthly, Having employed his own clerk to fix up these notices, whilst he supported the measure, he took advantage of that circumstance, when he had turned against you, and by refusing to let him attend at the House of Commons to prove their being so affixed, which was necessary before any thing could be done, he endeavoured to defeat your application at the very threshold, and absolutely created a considerable expence, and delay, by the necessity of obtaining, and executing, an order of the House of Commons to compel him.

Fifthly,

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Fifthly, In the law-suit which was instituted to compel me to prove my right of common, Mr. Taunton was engaged as the Attorney against me. When the action was tried at Oxford, after I had fully established that right, by evidence of immemorial and uninterrupted usage, the only witness produced on the other side gave a deposition so manifestly false and contradictory, that it was the request of the Special Jury that he should be indicted for perjury.

Such is the short history of Mr. Taunton's *concern* in the *former* application to Parliament, upon which he founds his claim to be now employed as Solicitor, in preference to any other person. It may be equally necessary to examine how far he is *concerned* in the *present* stage of the business.

When the plan for draining and dividing Otmoor was before set on foot, a complete investigation took place, and things were so well matured, that a Bill, with the approbation of a large majority of the Proprietors, was actually introduced into Parliament. After great delay had taken place, from the law-suit principally, it was judged adviseable, on account of the opposition of Lord Abingdon, to let it rest till a more favourable opportunity; but the friends to the Bill never had the most distant thought of abandoning it altogether, and always intended to revive it whenever there appeared a greater probability of success. By a melancholy event, which happened the latter end of last year, that opportunity seemed to offer itself, and it was the firm purpose of myself, and other Proprietors, to embrace it. But a decent respect for the memory of a deceased nobleman required, that his ashes should not be insulted, by bringing forwards a measure which he had opposed, the moment the breath was out of his body; some little time was proper to be allowed to his representatives to look into the state of his affairs; and, at any rate, nothing effectual could be done till this summer. But Mr. Taunton, changing sides a second time, and conceiving the design of taking the whole of the Otmoor business out of the hands of those who had first proposed and planned it, and of superseding the Solicitors originally employed, endeavoured to avail himself of this necessary delay. As early as the month of January, he began making under-hand applications to some of the Proprietors, without consulting the representatives of *his friend* Lord Abingdon; and though I am the largest Proprietor, though I was the first proposer of the business, had actually expended near three hundred pounds in promoting it, and, as he had several times heard from my own mouth, proposed to revive the Bill as soon as it could be prudently done, yet he never once condescended to mention the subject to me till the beginning of July. And this he is now pleased to call a *confidential communication*, and to accuse me of taking an undue advantage of it!

With respect to myself as *one individual*, since Mr. Taunton has always acted so decidedly in opposition to my rights, and particularly since his present language and behaviour has not been more friendly or conciliatory, I cannot place any confidence in measures of which he is to have the direction; and therefore I cannot, consistently with common prudence, give my consent to any Bill which is brought forwards under his management.

As to the present state of the business, Mr. Parker, and Mr. Moore, the gentlemen originally employed, with the concurrence of Lord Abingdon's trustees, of myself, and several other landholders interested, and somewhat relying upon the confidence before placed in them by the Proprietors at large, have ventured to fix up the necessary notices, and to apply to most of the Proprietors to know their present sentiments upon the subject; and I am happy to have it in my power to inform you, that the express consent of a prodigious majority has now been obtained. Nevertheless, Mr. Taunton, to introduce as much confusion as possible, has just begun to fix up a fresh set of notices, which are perfectly needless, and can only serve to occasion dissatisfaction in the Otmoor towns.

What has been hitherto done is certainly only provisional, and is still subject to the approbation, or disapprobation, of the Proprietors at large. They are at liberty to chuse their own Agents and Solicitors. Neither on this, nor upon any former occasion, have I ever endeavoured, or wished, to dictate to them. Where many persons are interested, it is necessary
that

that some should begin; the merit or demerit of this office is all I claim for myself. I have not been forward in recommending Solicitors. At first the appointment was offered to Mr. Walker, afterwards to Mr. Morell, and it was not till both those gentlemen had refused, and Mr. Moore, who was a considerable Proprietor, had been proposed to manage what was required to be done in the country, and when I found that there was no other person who had particularly the wishes of the proprietors, that I recommended Mr. Parker, as agent for the London part of the business. Not having heard any complaint against those gentlemen, and as they conducted the affair perfectly well before as far as it went, and have never received one farthing from the Proprietors, as a compensation for their trouble and expences, except what has been advanced by myself, I think they have as fair a claim to the appointment as any other persons, and certainly much better pretensions than Mr. Taunton.

I have the honour to be,

Gentlemen,

Your most obedient, humble servant,

ALEXANDER CROKE.

Studley,
10th Sept. 1800.

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September 10, 1800.